The liberal world order appears to be coming to an end - The Expose

By Rhoda Wilson | Jan. 20th, 2026

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Francis Fukuyama declared the "End of History" in 1989, stating that Western liberal democracy had become the final form of human government.

However, by 2026, the liberal world order appears to be coming to an end, with countries like China and the US disregarding international law and pursuing their own interests.

A new world order, possibly based on multipolar realism, may replace liberalism, where nations prioritise their own power and interests over idealistic notions of cooperation and democracy.

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Note: The liberal world order is also known as the "international rules-based order" or "liberal international order." While international institutions such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation were established as the blueprint for the liberal world order, the system was really powered by the United States. Read more HERE and HERE.

By Benjamin Bartee, 18 January 2026

Back in 1989, renowned political scientist Francis Fukuyama got a little bit over his skis, as they say, when he enthusiastically welcomed in a new (and

emphatically final) geopolitical epoch, audaciously dubbed the "End of History."

From 'The End of History?' (1989):

> **The twentieth century saw the developed world descend into a paroxysm of ideological violence, as liberalism contended first with the remnants of absolutism, then Bolshevism and fascism, and finally an updated Marxism** that threatened to lead to the ultimate apocalypse of nuclear war. But the century that began full of self-confidence in the ultimate triumph of Western liberal democracy seems at its close to be returning full circle to where it started: not to an "end of ideology" or a convergence between capitalism and socialism, as earlier predicted, but to an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism.
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> **The triumph of the West, of the Western idea, is evident first of all in the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism.** In the past decade, there have been unmistakable changes in the intellectual climate of the world's two largest communist countries, and the beginnings of significant reform movements in both. But this phenomenon extends beyond high politics and it can be seen also in the ineluctable spread of consumerist Western culture in such diverse contexts as the peasants' markets and colour television sets now omnipresent throughout China, the cooperative restaurants and clothing stores opened in the past year in Moscow, the Beethoven piped into Japanese department stores, and the rock music enjoyed alike in Prague, Rangoon, and Tehran.
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> **What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.** (Emphasis added)

Liberalism today, liberalism tomorrow, liberalism forever! – to paraphrase notorious Alabama segregationist George Wallace.

In chronological context, it was an understandable misapprehension that afflicted Fukuyama and clouded his crystal ball; in 1989, getting high on the liberal order supply was easy.

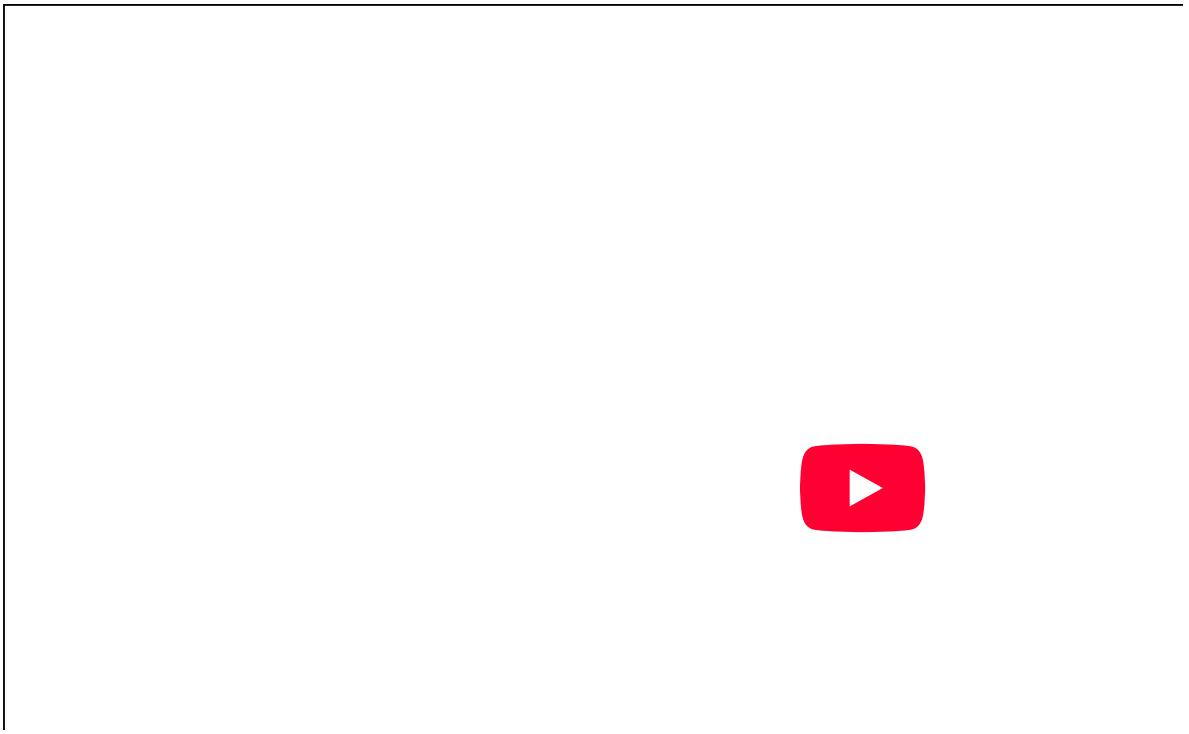
No serious ideological rivals to liberalism existed any longer at the international level; the liberal order, with the United States at the head, exercised global hegemony; everybody in the world over wanted a pair of blue jeans and a Chevy Corvette and a hot blonde on their arm and all of the glorious excesses of liberal capitalism.

Alas, the utopian "End of History," ironically, didn't last long; by 2026, universalist liberalism had now reached what very much looks like the end of the line – a mere three and a half decades since Fukuyama declared it the "final form of human government."

So-called "international law," which underpins the global liberal order, has always been heavier on the aspiration and lighter on the actual, existing in a nether-region between theory and practicality, applied and adhered to erratically and arbitrarily – with no consequences for those who violate it, provided they have the military power to thwart attempts at accountability.

Lots of examples abound, but a prime one, which has received relatively little attention with the heavy media focus on Latin America and the Middle East, was Xi Jinping announcing in his New Year's address that the forced "reunification" of Taiwan into the budding Sino Empire is "unstoppable" – a barely veiled flouting of the international powers that would threaten to oppose such a move militarily.

(I predict China will pull the trigger on the kinetic invasion before the end of the year if it can't submit Taiwan through economic or political pressure under threat of military action. The latter approach it would prefer for reasons of optics and because Taiwan is ethnically Chinese, likely tempering the bloodlust as the Chinese view the Taiwanese as their kin.)



Shanghai Eye: Chinese President Xi Jinping delivers 2026 New Year Address**, 31 December 2025 (10 mins)**

While China has long signalled its intent to reclaim Taiwan, which it lost in the middle of the last century as the last stronghold of the nationalists fighting the CCP, Xi would not have offered such direct talk just a year ago. Yet, inch by inch, as the liberal order loses its grip on geopolitics, with it goes the diplomatic imperative to couch rhetoric in terms in keeping with international law.

In the same vein, Trump has more or less openly admitted that the political, economic and military pressure applied to Venezuela, including the capture of its president, is about regional hegemony and natural resources: "We are going to have our very large United States oil companies go in, spend billions of dollars, fix the badly broken oil infrastructure and start making money for the country," he said.

The Western hemisphere "belongs to us," the mantra has gone of late. ("Us" meaning, ostensibly, the United States and the citizens thereof, although I don't feel it belongs to me as an American citizen quite as much as it will soon belong to Blackrock, Palantir and Chevron.)

In a way, the Venezuela rhetoric is much more honest than the obviously insincere 2003-era talk of delivering "democracy" to Iraq, Afghanistan, *et al.* Those countries were never going to adopt "democracy" even if the United States government insisted on it – which, despite the nonstop lip service, it didn't anyway because it didn't care much for constitutional republicanism at home, let alone abroad. Nonetheless, liberal etiquette required the lie to maintain the façade that the world runs on democratic values.

So, what will replace international liberalism?

Something, probably, on the order of multipolar realism – again, much less idealistic yet much more honest in a world that hitherto has functioned on pretty lies.

Via Independent Institute (emphasis added):

> Realism is one of the prominent international relations theories for explaining the behaviour of states. **The core essence of realism is** an attempt to explain "world politics as they really are, rather than describe how they ought to be," **presenting the world as a state of anarchy where nations, acting as unitary rational actors, compete with each other to maximise their power**, "the only – variable of interest."
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> Realism is often juxtaposed with liberalism, the belief that the "national characteristics of individual States matter for their international relations" and that it is possible for different types of regimes to operate in different ways, such as Kant's theory of democratic peace. **Liberal "institutionalism," the ideology on which diplomats in the West are brought up, is the belief that "international institutions facilitate cooperation and peace among countries."** The difference between these schools of thought can be understood through their perspectives on international institutions.
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> While liberals assume that organisations like the United Nations are a genuine platform for international cooperation, **realists assume that**

> these institutions do very little to prevent states from pursuing their interests and can very often serve as a vector through which state interests are pursued.

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Benjamin Bartee, author of '*Broken English Teacher: Notes From Exile*', is an independent Bangkok-based American journalist. He publishes articles on two Substack pages: '*Armageddon Prose*' and '*Armageddon Safari*'. You can follow *Amageddon Prose* on Twitter (now X) HERE. If you would like to support his work, you can donate HERE.

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